

Interview Transcript

Interview Date: September 1, 2016

Interviewee: Sister Kathleen Kelly

Interviewer: Shannon Green, Director, CSJ Institute, Mount Saint Mary's University; Kelby Thwaits, Instructor, Film and Television, Mount Saint Mary's University.

Location: [MSMU Doheny Campus?]

Transcription Date: 10/27/2016

Transcribed By: Nancy Steinmann

[00:00:00.00] INTERVIEWER: Sr. Kathleen, would you--to start out, would you state your full name and your age?

[00:00:10.10] SISTER KATHLEEN KELLY: I'm Sister Kathleen Kelly, and I'm eighty-one years old.

[00:00:15.28] INTERVIEWER: Tell me a little bit about where you're from, where you grew up, and your family.

[00:00:21.03] SISTER KATHLEEN KELLY: I was born in Brooklyn, New York, and my father was transferred to California when I was going into the ninth grade. So he enrolled me at St. Mary's Academy, and at that time the principal told him there was no room. Sr. Josephine Feely was the principal, and he said to her, "Then my daughter's soul is on your soul." [laughs] So, I was admitted to St. Mary's Academy and attended St. Mary's for four years. So I grew up in the Los Angeles area.

[00:00:57.11] INTERVIEWER: And it sounds like your family was a religious Catholic family.

[00:01:00.25] SISTER KATHLEEN KELLY: My family was a Catholic family; I wouldn't say they were particularly religious. Actually we had no one in our family who was in religious life at all. So, it was a big surprise to them when I--said I wanted to enter the convent.

[00:01:17.03] INTERVIEWER: How did they feel about you wanting to enter the convent?

[00:01:19.04] SISTER KATHLEEN KELLY: Very negative. [laughs] I actually--thought I wanted to enter the convent when I was about in the fifth grade. I had a very joyful Sister at that time, and I said, "If she can be so happy, and give her life to God, that's what I want to do." However, when I got to high school, I discovered boys. And so I prayed every night, "God, I don't want to be a nun." But God keeps calling and calling and calling, and so by the end of high school I--actually then had to really beg, because I was not the most--obedient girl in high school, and they kept saying, "If you obey the rules for six weeks, we'll let you be interviewed." My family was extremely negative about it. My father cried. And my relatives promised me trips to every place in the world if I would not enter. But I did, and it's been a wonderful life.

[00:02:14.16] INTERVIEWER: Do you have any early memories of getting to know the Sisters of St. Joseph at St. Mary's Academy?

[00:02:20.08] SISTER KATHLEEN KELLY: Yes, actually, I was going to enter a group of Franciscan Sisters that I had in grammar school, and went back in junior year to be interviewed by them. And was very--non-impressed. And it was at that time that I really said I want to be a Sister of St. Joseph, really because of their--their joy and happiness, but also their friendliness to each other. They were very--it was very--edifying to see how kind and caring they were of each other. And that's really what impressed me, and why I entered the Sisters of St. Joseph.

[00:02:58.00] INTERVIEWER: What were your hopes for your religious life at that time?

[00:03:00.24] SISTER KATHLEEN KELLY: [laughs] Actually, I had just seen "The Song of Bernadette" [1943], and one of the scenes in it was her scrubbing the floor and the novice mistress dumping the water. And I kind of thought that's what it would be like. [laughs]. So, I--entered the convent because, you know, the catechism answer to know love and serve God, and that's really what I wanted to do. I wanted to know God better, I wanted to love God more, and I wanted to serve God's people. So I had no other hopes or

expectations other than that.

[00:03:36.04] INTERVIEWER: What was it like when you entered? Do you have memories from taking your vows, or receiving the habit, how did you feel?

[00:03:43.23] INTERVIEWER: I always felt this is where I belonged. At one point I was very homesick, and I remember the novice mistress sending me out to walk outside and think about why I wanted to be a Sister. And--I really wanted to be a Sister. And so the homesickness was there, but it--it was more important that I be a Sister. So, I was always afraid that they were going to throw me out. So I tried very hard--to do what I was supposed to do, and--my novitiate years were happy years, and my early--I had a wonderful--missions, and loved everyone that I went to, so I had a very happy--not that it wasn't hard, and there were different--tensions and so on, but I have very happy memories of my early years.

[00:04:43.23] INTERVIEWER: And you studied at the Mount for your undergraduate degree? What did you study and what were your hopes for your missions--early missions at that time?

[00:04:51.25] SISTER KATHLEEN KELLY: We all went to the Mount. We lived at St. Mary's Academy and took the bus on Saturdays, while we were teaching. I taught--started out teaching fifth grade at St. Bernadette's. And then went to the Mount on Saturdays, received my bachelor's degree in History, and my--then I received my master's degree in History at the Mount as well. It was one of the first--MA in History at the Mount. And I had a wonderful time. One of the things--we had Sister Agnes Bernard [Cavanaugh (1872-1961)], who was a--one of the founders of the Mount, and was a wonderful History teacher, and we had small seminars, and--so it was a great experience--really. I loved the Mount.

[00:05:35.03] INTERVIEWER: Did you feel encouraged to pursue higher education by the community?

[00:05:39.22] SISTER KATHLEEN KELLY: At that time we were asked to do it. [laughs] We were not encouraged, we were--told. [laughs]. So I--because they needed people in the Masters in History I got my Masters in History. But after that I went to--I taught in high school, and then I became a principal, and while I was--and then I had a few other--I worked--I was in community administration for a while, secondary school supervisor, and during that time I was asked about getting a PhD. And I went to Fordham [University, New York]--I was sent to Fordham to get a PhD in Russian History. But that was also the time when they were kind of worried about communism, so I had almost completed my PhD at Fordham when all of a sudden [laughs]--there was this concern about I was studying Russian History, and maybe that was not the best thing for me to study. So--I discontinued my studies at Fordham, and then--a few years later I was asked if I would consider again a PhD. So I started all over again at University of Southern California, and I received my PhD in Chinese and Japanese Studies--History. Which was a very new field to me [laughs]. But a very fascinating field.

[00:07:03.19] INTERVIEWER: In your early missions you taught and you were principal in secondary education. Can you talk about the transition from working in secondary education to then going to work in higher education, and what that was like for you, what you were hoping for?

[00:07:20.03] SISTER KATHLEEN KELLY: I was principal of Carondelet High School. We were a founding group of Carondelet High School in Concord [California], and I loved high school. We had a very innovative program at Carondelet, and introduced some--really--we introduced the January session, and we did some very innovative things at Carondelet. So I loved being principal in high school. After I was principal at high school I was--became the secondary supervisor, so I had a transition of--supervising the secondary schools that our sisters taught in. And then I was asked to go to Mount St. Mary's College Doheny campus. And at that time the Doheny campus was extremely small, so I came from a high school with nine hundred girls to the Doheny campus, which at that time had about--maybe thirty students. [laughs]. And I was told that I was to "reinvigorate" the Doheny campus or we were going to have to close it. So [laughs]--that was quite a charge. And I actually kept thinking, "What am I supposed to do here?" I came from, you know, nine hundred to about thirty students. So, I--had a--challenge, I would say, to really--to try to bring about some change at the Doheny campus and to get more students. So it was not so much a transition as a new challenge. So I developed programs on the Doheny campus which--like I got a group of admissions--high school admissions counselors and teachers, and we developed an advisory board. And I developed a

program at Doheny--actually we called it the Alternative Access Program. And that program was--really what the purpose of the Doheny campus was initially, was to--recruit students--to bring students on the Doheny campus who were smart and intelligent who had not done well in high school, and so to provide the tools that they needed to be successful. So we called this the Alternative Access program--to the baccalaureate program. So it was the whole idea that they would not only get an Associate of Arts, but they would transfer into the baccalaureate program. And that--and we developed all the tools and the programs that were needed; the Learning Resource Center started at that time, the special classes started at that time. So we developed that program that actually became nationally known. And did increase the number of students there. We also increased the number of masters degrees at Doheny. So, we really built the Doheny campus. So I was there for about twenty years, so. [laughs]. And a wonderful, wonderful experience. I loved the Doheny campus--still love the Doheny campus.

[00:10:29.13] INTERVIEWER: It sounds like there's much to be proud of there. Are there some other things that you're very proud of from your time at Mount St. Mary's College at the Doheny campus?

[00:10:38.09] SISTER KATHLEEN KELLY: Well, the other thing that we also developed there was a multi-cultural emphasis, and we wrote and received a number of grants to integrate multi-cultural--ideas into the curriculum. And that's when the Cultural Fluency Program started. So, I think what I'm most proud of at the Doheny campus is responding to needs. We really looked at the city of Los Angeles and said, "What does the city of Los Angeles need?" And at that time--we had forty different languages spoken within about a three mile radius of Doheny, so it's very multi-cultural. So I think that whole Cultural Fluency--the whole integration of cultural concepts across the curriculum, the programs that helped those students who were, as I said, very smart students but had very poor backgrounds. So to help them to succeed. Not only did many of them receive their bachelors, but many have gone on for masters and PhD's. So the development of that program and the success of that program, with students who otherwise would never have even finished college, I think I'm most proud of that.

[00:11:55.02] INTERVIEWER: Were you at the Doheny campus during the Rodney King riots [1992]?

[00:11:58.20] SISTER KATHLEEN KELLY: Yes I was.

[00:11:59.12] INTERVIEWER: Do you have any memories? I know I didn't ask you about this in advance. Is there anything from that time you can share?

[00:12:05.03] SISTER KATHLEEN KELLY: Woah. That was an extremely frightening time. We had to evacuate the campus, and at that time the busses were parked at Chalon [campus]. So we had to get the busses from Chalon down there and take the students back to Chalon. And four of us stayed on the campus and [laughs] prayed that we would be safe. And, it was--we saw the fires--I mean it was a very frightening time. However, they never touched the campus. And I do think that it was because they respected--what we were doing there--knew what we were doing there, and respected what we were doing there, because we had girls from the neighborhood. So when we talk about our dear neighbor, and educating--girls and women from the neighborhood, that's what we were doing at Doheny. And I think the neighbors understood that. So never did we--we had not one touch of anything there. We were very safe. But it was scary. [laughs].

[00:13:08.16] INTERVIEWER: You said you're very proud of the--you know, of the educating of that student population. Is there an alumnae story that--of a particular student that you'd like to share? A success story?

[00:13:19.29] SISTER KATHLEEN KELLY: The one that comes to my mind--I was there two years, and we had--these students came rushing into my office and said, "Sister, Sister, there's a big fight! There's fist fight!" I said, "What? A fist fight?" [laughs]. And I came running out and--we had a number of girls who were punching each other. So I called them into the office, and said, "What is going--?" Anyway, "What is going on?" and so on and so on. And we tried to resolve the issue. They went out, and it occurred again. So I brought them back into my office, and we had a reconciliation service, a prayer to St. Francis, prayer for peace, we did this whole reconciliation. [smiles]. And they went out and did not do it again. But the ring-leader of that group was a--a young woman who had come from Cuba. Remember when [U. S. President Jimmy] Carter released the prisoners from Cuba? [The Mariel Boatlift, April 15 to October 31, 1980]. Her father was one of those prisoners. Her mother was a prostitute. This girl was--her principal was the one who

said to her, "You have something, and you have to develop this." But she was a diamond in the rough--was she in the rough. [laughs]. But she persevered. We worked with her--I remember--she almost was thrown out but I was Dean, so I said, "We'll give you another chance." She now has her PhD. So that's--and she has come back, she has two children, she's happily married, and has her PhD. Those are--I could tell you many, many stories like that. But she's the one that comes to my mind right away, because--so successful, but out of a background that you never would think would be a successful PhD--a teacher. So, that's just one story. [laughs].

[00:15:26.18] INTERVIEWER: How does that feel?

[00:15:27.04] SISTER KATHLEEN KELLY: That's what--I mean when I think back, those are the memories that just--I'm so proud of those young women, and all that they have done and accomplished. And the other thing about it is, you know we--as Sisters--what we have emphasized in education is that education is not for--just for ourselves, but it is to give back, and to be of service.

[00:15:51.05] [Helicopter noise.] [Director's comments.]

[00:16:56.01] INTERVIEWER: So I was asking you how you felt. And you were talking about how education is not just for us.

[00:17:02.08] SISTER KATHLEEN KELLY: Yes, as sisters we've always emphasized that education is not just for the student, the young women. It is for how we can give back, and how we can be of service to others. And we talk about service to the dear neighbor. And that is instilled, I believe, in our alums. And that's what I have seen with the--women particularly, that I knew at Doheny. They--have a sense of that giving back. And when we have alumnae meetings it's so--you're so proud of how our alums have given back, and the whole idea is to transform the world into Christ's Kingdom of justice, peace and love. And that's what they're about. It's--another one it's just--I'll tell you--I could go on and on with stories, but let me tell you another story. This young woman, I thought, "Oh, she's got a religious vocation." [laughs]. And, you know, we were looking at women who--we thought might have a religious vocation. And so I talked to her, and she was very--she was very --touched that I would think that she would have a religious vocation. But, I went to her wedding [laughs]--and she wrote to me after she was married, and she said, "Both my husband and I are working for the church." So we are--we have a vocation--it is not just a vocation to religious life. But that's the kind of stories that you hear over and over, of --what they are doing in the world to make the world a better place. So, that's what I'm most proud of.

[00:18:39.05] INTERVIEWER: Let's talk a little bit about Vatican II and how that impacted you, and your missions, and your understanding of religious life, as well as the community. So what was Vatican II like for you?

[00:18:51.05] SISTER KATHLEEN KELLY: Well, actually, when we entered--a number of years ago, we didn't even know anything about our founding--our founders, our founding documents--we didn't know about our charism. It was what attracted me, as I mentioned, was the living of that charism. So although we couldn't put it specifically into what it was, it was lived. It was inclusive love, and it was unity and reconciliation, but we didn't have those names. I visited a group of Sisters of St. Joseph in Brentwood [Los Angeles, California], and at that time we were not in connection with each other. They actually had the same prayers that we did, and the same spirit and charism. So--it's so interesting that that charism was lived but not articulated. So--Vatican II--that was one of the most exciting things for me, was to really learn about our charism, our founders, why we were founded--it was just a tremendous--it left a tremendous impression on me, and I was fortunate enough to be asked to work with Father Nepper [SJ, see Nepper, Marius, SJ. 1975. *Origins: The Sisters of St. Joseph: translation commissioned by the Federation of the Sisters of St. Joseph, USA. Erie: Villa Maria College*] who was a Jesuit priest who had translated our documents from the French into the English. And so a group of us went to St. Louis [Missouri] and worked with him. And so, then when we went to write our new constitution, we incorporated some of those new ideas. So, what excited me was the whole idea that our community was founded to--to divide the city, to see what were the issues and problems of the city, and to address those issues and problems, never by ourselves, but always in collaboration with others. So the ministries broadened at that time. Because--before Vatican II we were really in teaching and nursing. And that was not our call. Our call was to see what was needed to be done, and to do it. And so that I think

gave us a great sense of--looking at the needs. What were the needs, and how could we respond to those needs? It intensified in us a sense of social justice, and working with the poor, and--I guess I--that was not new for me, because my family was very activist, and in high school I was part of the Young Christian Students, and we were very active in high school. So it was not a new concept. But it was how could we incorporate that. So, for example, at Carondelet High School, where I was principal, we--incorporated ideas of--for example, we partnered with our elementary school that was for African-American students in Oakland, and we had our students go there and they--. So we did a number of different kinds of activities, that really were about justice and really trying to work with the poor. And although Carondelet at that time--is an affluent area--we had a number of students who were not affluent. But we also emphasized--and the whole justice issue, and the encyclicals, and--so it gave a new sense of what our mission and ministry was about. And I could go on forever, so stop me if this is too long.

[00:22:19.13] INTERVIEWER: What about for you personally? What did--did it reignite something in you spiritually, or affect you personally, or you could talk about maybe the decision to not wear the habit--what were some of your personal changes?

[00:22:34.05] SISTER KATHLEEN KELLY: [laughs]. Well, actually I'm going to say something that--I was--kind of a forward thinker. [laughs]. And I remember Sister Suzanne Jabro was the novice [director], and I taught Suzanne and helped her enter. And I remember visiting her and saying, "You know, it won't be long before we're not wearing the habit." And she said, "What?" [laughs]. And I said--and she was--just got the habit. [laughs]. So I said, "No, I don't think it's going to be long and we won't be wearing the habit", because again, our founding documents said we were not to be separated--we were to be one among--and be part of the community. So we were not to be--set aside--set apart. And I think that's--that again, gave me a sense of that is why we were founded, and so it gave me a--I guess a renewed confirmation--affirmation, that I belonged with the Sisters of St. Joseph, and a new sense of how we could--how we could mission--minister through this mission. So it was very exciting for me. It also--as a leader, I also--we did some experiments with community living. One experiment we did at Carondelet High School was--I, as principal, wrote a philosophy of education. And I hired the Sisters. That was brand new, because the Sisters had always been sent. So I participated in a lot of experiments that--well, were--had good points and bad points, as all do. I think the other thing that--Vatican II did, was--all of us had to develop a sense of spirituality. We followed rules and regulations. And we all sat together for meditation. But in a certain sense, we didn't have a deep spirituality. And I think what Vatican II did was to call us to that--to call us each--to look at our relationship with God, to look at our relationship with each other, and how was that--how could we deepen that, and how could that again motivate us in terms of our ministry. So, there was a deepening. And that really happened for me. I had a particularly wonderful retreat during that period of time, and it--it really gave me that sense of--what I had always wanted--you know, to love God and to be in a personal relationship with God, and to--really believe that that's why I was a Sister. It was all about God. And I think that's what Vatican II called us to. It also--at that time, there were many Sisters who knew that they did not have a vocation. And I think again that freed them to be able to see, "What is God calling me to right now? And if it's not religious life, what is it?" And I've always maintained that they had temporary vows, because most of those Sisters continued to be of service to the Church, be of service to others, and to continue that call in a different way.

[00:26:05.13] INTERVIEWER: Is there a way that you today would characterize the spirituality of the Sisters of St. Joseph? Are there characteristics of it that you experience across the community?

[00:26:17.17] SISTER KATHLEEN KELLY: That's a hard question. [laughs].

[00:26:22.00] INTERVIEWER: You talked about developing your own spirituality, so I'm wondering if there's a way to talk about it.

[00:26:27.17] SISTER KATHLEEN KELLY: It's in the context. It's in the context of the Sisters of St. Joseph. I think the context is really inclusive love. And--our charism is unity of neighbor with neighbor and neighbor with God. And I think it is in that context of love of God through love of neighbor that deepens our spirituality. And it's also in a--we are contemplatives in action. And I think we got the action. [laughs]. But we didn't always get the contemplation. And I think it's now that we realize how important our contemplation is, and that our action should come out through the contemplation--out of the contemplation.

I think that's very Sister of St. Joseph. That--and in terms of contemplation even the whole idea that if you just contemplate it's not enough. [laughs]. That you need to be of service--that contemplation needs to lead to action. So I'd say that's a characteristic. And I think the--other characteristic is--we have a--as a Sisters of St. Joseph we are humble. And that's been part of our characteristic as well. There's a humility, and that comes from--and I think this is also a characteristic--of emptying of yourself, of trying to empty yourself so that you are filled with God. And I think that's a characteristic of the Sisters. Sometimes I've been in leadership positions, and that humility has not always helped us. I remember at the Mount, we had a WASC [Western Association of Schools & Colleges, accreditation body] visit. And this WASC visit was glowing. But we didn't talk about the fact that we were so wonderful. So sometimes we're too humble. We don't talk about the wonderful things that we have done. And so humility has--humility has to be truth. And truth sometimes is that we need to brag about what we have done. Anyway, that was some of the characteristics.

[00:28:51.19] INTERVIEWER: One more question on the history. As you engage the history and the foundations from Le Puy [France] to Tucson [Arizona] and Los Angeles, is there a piece of the history that you personally connect with, or are particularly inspired by?

[00:29:07.06] SISTER KATHLEEN KELLY: I'm inspired by those first Sisters--who came together. They were a motley crew. [laughs]. Some were educated, some were not educated. They desired religious life. They desired to love God and serve God. And there was not a place for them at that time, because as you know, most religious orders at that time were contemplative. So I really relate to those first six Sisters who--again, divided the city, and did what was needed, and the risk that they took--because that was something brand new. I think the--Father [Jean Paul] Médaille [(1618-1689)] and his leadership--so I relate to that very strongly--the risk. And then to the re-founding, because the re-founding again was a terrible risk at that time, with the conditions in France. So I just love our early Sisters and their history. I love the early constitutions, I really relate to that--to the beginnings, and why we were founded. And that's what we have to continue today--the reason why we were founded, and why we continue the charism at this time.

[00:30:33.04] INTERVIEWER: Can you tell me about your time at the [United Nations] NGO [non-governmental organization], and what--and how you got involved with the issue of human trafficking?

[00:30:40.14] SISTER KATHLEEN KELLY: After I was in religious community leadership, I had a sabbatical. So I thought, "What do I want to do with this year?" So I actually knew Sister Carol Zinn [SSJ, NGO UN Representative of the Congregations of St. Joseph], who was the NGO at the United Nations--so asked her if I could come and work with her. So I worked at the United Nations and concentrated on the--our NGO at the United Nations concentrates on girls and--girls' education across the world. And I thought, well I want to be even more specific. So I wanted to concentrate on human trafficking. So I--it was a wonderful, wonderful experience. I went to the United Nations every day, and interacted with other NGOs--we used to do white papers together. And we'd go to the sessions that were especially about these issues, and interacted with national--international leaders, especially about girls' education, and about human trafficking. And so, I found out the extent of the problem, and how the United Nations was dealing with it, but how so many countries were not dealing with it, and actually in the United States--was not dealing--that was a long time ago--United States was not dealing with it as well. So I--that--I particularly worked on that. And then when I came home I wanted to continue that, but I was asked to go to St. Mary's Academy to [laughs] raise money, basically. But I continued doing workshops on human trafficking at that time. And then I just couldn't do them both. So I trained other people to do workshops on human trafficking. And as we know there's been great progress in trying to deal with that problem, especially in California. And I give credit to the women religious in California, for the leadership they took in legislation. So--yes, it was a fascinating time. And I loved living in Manhattan. [laughs].

[00:32:48.03] INTERVIEWER: Let's talk a little bit about religious life today. What is your--how do you feel about the state of religious life today, and do you have hopes or anxieties in terms of the decline of vocations and the aging of the community?

[00:33:08.16] SISTER KATHLEEN KELLY: I am saddened, because I think religious life is a wonderful way of life. And it is a wonderful--I've had an extremely happy life. I never would have met the people I have met in my lifetime if I had not been a religious, or done the things that I have done. I mean, I've had--extraordinary opportunities. And so I am saddened. But I am also--extremely hopeful--and excited, about

how we continue to--how the charism can continue when or if we are not here. So we are--I'm on a couple of committees in community where we are working on ways that we--kind of hope we can ensure that the charism continues. For example, we have just changed the governance structure for our sponsored institutions, because the sponsored institutions are our legacy and heritage. So that is the way I think the charism can continue. And we have wonderful laity. I said in the beginning that as our early Sisters divided up the city, they never did it alone. They always did it with others; they always did it in collaboration. And so the people who are leaders in our sponsored institutions today are wonderful leaders that understand, live the charism, and will take that charism forward. We need to ensure that for the future, because this is now, and what's going to happen in twenty years? So we need to ensure that for the future, and I think we are doing that. So I'm--I'm excited about the fact that we are doing something--which many communities are not doing--to ensure that the charism will continue. I also think that we are doing other things financially that will help to fund those institutions in the future, because I believe that is our heritage. So I am--I'm hopeful and excited about giving that over, so that it may continue. I think that we need to--think about how we live religious life today in a different way. Because I do think that God is calling women. But I don't think that we know how to--live the life that--women will be called to. So I think there's so many--we'd say we're in transition. So we've been in transition for a long time [laughs]. But I do think that there are women called to religious life. Now how that life will be I don't know. And whether we Sisters of St. Joseph, I don't know. But I'm hopeful. I think also--one of the things that I think that we--we made mistakes--everybody makes mistakes. One of the mistakes we made was we didn't continue some of the kinds of practices that I think would have given us some more solidarity. And perhaps would have--we would have been able to attract women at that time. I think there was a span of time when we could have done things differently, and didn't. I think it's Joan Chittister's [Sister Joan D. Chittister, OSB] book is called "Fire In These Ashes" ["The Fire In These Ashes: A Spirituality of Contemporary Religious Life", 1995, Kansas City:Sheed & Ward.] There was a time when we had fire in these ashes, and it was that time that I think we kind of missed the boat. But I'm hopeful that now--there's a new emphasis on contemplation, there's a new emphasis on contemplative action, so I'm hoping that that will be--what we missed.

[00:37:17.22] INTERVIEWER: What has been the greatest joy of your religious life, if you could sum it up?

[00:37:23.07] SISTER KATHLEEN KELLY: [laughs]. Well, actually, the whole life has been a joy. I have--had wonderful missions, and wonderful ministry. I have had wonderful friends in community, wonderful support in community. As I said, I would not have--met the wonderful people that I have. I didn't mention Ascension Health. I have been Chair of Ascension Health, which is--where--when the Sisters of St. Joseph decided that we were no longer going to have our Catholic health system, we disbanded that and looked to join another one, and we joined Ascension Health. And Ascension Health is a wonderful Catholic organization. And I guess one of the joys of my religious life has been being part of Ascension, and knowing the people who are the leaders of Ascension, who are all lay, who see ministry and mission the same way I do. Seeing that there are leaders who are really leading these institutions as Catholic institutions, as models, and continuing the mission of Jesus--the healing mission of Jesus, and really bringing about transformation in this world. So I think that's been one of my great joys, is being with other leaders who have--we are doing what we say we're doing. We are saying that we are trying to transform the world. And I think that's been a great joy for me. And a great joy because--as Sisters, as religious, we have the freedom to risk-- we have the freedom to risk, and we have been able to risk and join with others who also, I believe, now have the freedom to risk. So that's a short answer. [laughs].

[00:39:33.06] INTERVIEWER: Is there a story of another sister who has gone before you, who you remember fondly, that you would like to share with us, since--someone who can no longer speak for herself?

[00:39:44.05] SISTER KATHLEEN KELLY: Well, I would say Sister Magdalen Coughlin [(-1994)], who actually was my best friend, and who was President of the Mount, and also a wonderful leader in higher education, but also a very innovative and--very risk-taking person, who--I think really helped to develop the Mount into a national organization, because of her willingness, again, to risk and to--take the Mount to another level. For example, we went to the Ford Foundation; we had grants from the Johnson & Johnson Foundation. We went to the national sense. And so I think at that time the Mount really did have a sense of that we were a national organization. And she was a wonderful leader, and a wonderful friend, and a great support to me. So I wish she could tell her story. The other person I would mention is Sister [Mary Esther] McCann [(1905-2011)]. Sister Esther McCann was a hospital administrator, and again, was a leader in hospital

administration, and again a wonderful, joyous, happy--and so was Sister Magdalen, very joyous and happy Sisters--and really gave of themselves, but gave also as leaders, both in congregation and religious life but also in both health care and higher education. So I'd mention those two.

[00:41:20.18] INTERVIEWER: Could you share a little bit about your involvement at the congregational level, or the national level beyond the province of the Sisters of St Joseph?

[00:41:30.23] SISTER KATHLEEN KELLY: Well as--in provincial leadership-- I was in provincial leadership, and at that time we met together with the congregational leadership and the other provincial leaders. And I was also then, during that time, very active in the Federation of the Sisters of St. Joseph. And it was during that period that we established the Federation novitiate. We saw that we needed to come together more, and to be one--both as Federation and as congregation. So we saw how we could do that. So we established the Federation novitiate, we established regular meetings of the Federation, we also established the Le Puy Institute--when I was in Federation leadership, and the ability of the Le Puy Institute to bring the third world Sisters to France, and to really have that as a center for our leaders as we know. You went to Le Puy? Yes. How wonderful it is, and how it gives to you a sense of the beginnings. And I think that--was very important to me--both as congregational leader and as Federation leader, to have those kind of educational experiences, formation experiences, that we would need for the future. So I think even at that time we were really looking to--you know, what's the future going to be and how can we prepare for the future now. I also had the opportunity to go to Peru, and that was really life-changing for me to see the work that the Sisters do in Peru, and again the risks that they took and are taking in Peru, and to hear some of the stories of what they've been through in Peru, and the poverty. So that was also a real life-changing experience for me when I was in congregational leadership.

[00:43:37.25] KELBY THWAITS: Can you in general--the AA Program is what you helped develop and found, really at Doheny, and brought it out of--

[00:44:02.04] SISTER KATHLEEN KELLY: Decline. [laughs]

[00:44:03.29] KELBY THWAITS: Yes. To say it gently, decline. So as you were doing that--first of all that's part of where I got my start--

[00:44:13.25] SISTER KATHLEEN KELLY: Did you?

[00:44:14.12] KELBY THWAITS: --was at Doheny with teaching Soc 30, and Soc 1 to students in the AA Program, as well as at Chalon. And so now we have graduate programs which have since stemmed out of Doheny. From where you were, bringing it really from a difficult position, that was at possible closure, what did you foresee and how much of that has come to fruition? When you were in the middle of it, going "How do I salvage this?" what was your vision for the future of Doheny in that experience? Or were you just saying, "Hey, can we just hold on for dear life?" I mean, what was that like?

[00:45:00.00] SISTER KATHLEEN KELLY: My experience at Doheny was this is a jewel in the middle of the city, and how can we respond to the city--because of first of all where we are, and our mission--the mission of Doheny. Sister [Mary] Rebecca Doan [(1910-1999)], as you know, as President envisioned the Doheny campus as an opportunity for women, especially from St. Mary's Academy--it was interesting--St. Mary's Academy, who could not be admitted directly to Chalon, but could be admitted to an AA program. So that was the initial mission. It was for students who needed--extra help. So I did envision developing that program--as I said, as an alternative access to the baccalaureates. It would be automatic. They would get their AA, then they would go. But also, in the midst of the city, looking at what the needs of the city were in terms of our teacher education program, and how could we develop that teacher education program to better meet the needs of the city. That's when we looked at the Cultural Fluency Center, we developed that. We developed, as I said, the multi-cultural curriculum, so that infusion of multi-cultural elements were across the board in the curriculum. We looked at graduate programs--we did increase the number of graduate programs at that time. We also added the Evening College, so we added the AA--the Associate of Arts Nursing Program in the Evening College, and began to look at other ways that we could service the city. So it was--a vision, for looking at--how could we be this jewel and really go out to the city and look at the needs of the city. I didn't also mention the Olympics [1984] happened during our time there. And this was an

interes--Sister Magdalen and I decided that we would see if we could rent the campus [laughs] for the Olympics. And we were in touch with AT&T at that time. And so, of course they wanted to rent the campus--the gorgeous Doheny Mansion. And at that time we--they wanted a dorm, and we needed a dorm, so we built the dorm in time for the Olympics. And our first conversation--we had never rented any of the facilities before. Our first conversation with AT&T--we asked them--I can't remember, maybe like five thousand or something--I don't know how--and they went, "Yes!". [laughs]. Of course! And both of us went out and said, "We should have asked for double!" [laughs]. But anyway, that helped us with the vision of what the Doheny campus could be. That's why I mention it. We actually--we built the dorms, so we knew that we were going to--we knew we were going to have more resident students, for example. At the time I came, we had Prague [Infant of Prague Convent]--Stimson House. That was our residence hall. And we had very few students in there. The students--actually ate in the dining room of Number 8 [Doheny Mansion]--that was where the resident students ate. We had no--hardly any class--I mean, we had one classroom building. So we knew that we were going to build the Doheny campus. So we built the residence hall. And then had that built by AT&T, really. We got a whole new technology--telephone system through AT&T. We also envisioned--so all the new buildings at Doheny--we had, when I came, the library was in Number 2--the library was in Number 2, the floors were falling in, the books were old, so we knew we needed to build the library, so we built the [J. Thomas] McCarthy Library. The Learning Resource Center was in a little--one of those rooms as well, so we built a new Learning Resource Center. We had the Physical Therapy Assistant Program--was part of the evening programs, so the Physical Therapy Assistant Program needed new facilities. So we built that whole complex [Sister Magdalen Coughlin Learning Complex] at that time, and that was envisioning what the Doheny Campus could be. I--we also looked at different kinds of degrees that we could have there, and so as I said we began developing masters programs as well. I frankly did predict that we would have a PhD in Physical Therapy, because the masters program at that time was at a level that physical therapists could not get professional jobs--it was just changing. So I thought that we would have a PhD program for that. So our vision of Doheny--my vision--was that this is a jewel--let's make it a jewel. And it has become--I know, as now--and I have to say that many of the teachers when I first came did not want to teach at Doheny. [smiles]. I used to have to beg for teachers to come teach there. Now, I understand, everyone wants to teach there. [laughs]. And everybody wants to be there. We didn't have any offices, for example--the president's office was at Chalon--we had no offices down there for anybody from Chalon. And we had some full-time teachers, but mostly part-time teachers. So--I have to say it was a struggle. And it was a struggle--shall I say this--because--I came from high school. Colleges are often very elitist. And to have an AA Program, and build an AA Program, was kind of looked at as not so good. And so we had to really project how this could help the whole college. And we got so many grants for the AA Program, because it was unique, it was redressing a need, it was addressing a need of the city, of the minority students--so it was addressing a real need that in many cases other colleges were not doing. So, it was a struggle. It was a fight. [laughs]. But we did it. But after--oh--and I have to mention Father Matthew Delaney, who was the Academic Dean. And he said to me, "Do what you need to do. And don't go through faculty committees." Do you want to believe that one? [laughs]. So I did. And he gave me--and Sister Magdalen as well--but he gave me the go-ahead to do what I needed to do at that time. Now if we had to put a new degree in of course, we'd have to go through--but to do the Learning Resource Center, to do the--we did introductory courses. Sr. James Marian [Dyer '68, MSMU history instructor] and I taught and introductory course taught--called "Introduction to the Humanities". And I said, even if we just talk to them. These students come from no context. So even if we just talk to them. We used to take them to movies. We took them to a movie at the beach--they'd never been to the beach. They'd never been out of their neighborhood. We took them to a play. We read the newspaper to them. So they--so we developed classes that really helped these students to have a context. I also--oh I'm trying to remem--what was her name? The educator--oh I'm--but I asked her, "How do we educate adult students?" Because these students are coming to us and they are--they're not educated, and they don't have family backgrounds. We were read to, we were talked to. And she said to me, "Remember--many of these students at home get a command: Do this, do that. But they are never talked to." So she said the more you can engage them, the more you can talk to them, the more you can give them context--and so we did that with some of our courses--that we put in down there. So it was a really wonderful time, because you had to think about--who is this student that we are trying to educate, and what does she need? And she needed social--I used to have a--I used to have a dinner, where--it was called "Don't Slurp Your Soup". [smiles]. And we'd have a dinner. And we would have--place settings, where we had the silverware all in the right place, and we would teach them how to eat, and how to have the forks, and how to have social interaction. We took them to restaurants. So we looked at what did this person need, and what did this student need? And we built everything around it. And I have to say Father Delaney gave

me the go-ahead to do that. So thank you [looks up]--thank you. [laughs].

[00:54:32.10] INTERVIEWER: What are you doing these days in terms of ministry?

[00:54:35.15] SISTER KATHLEEN KELLY: I am helping St. Mary's Academy. We--St. Mary's Academy is in Inglewood, and primarily students--minority students who are economically impoverished. And so I am helping with their capital campaign and raising money, and continue to be a consultant for development at St. Mary's. And then I'm on many committees in community. I'm on the Housing Committee, the Finance Committee, the Governance Committee, and the committee that we're developing a trust. So I'm doing a lot of work in religious community as well. So that's keeping me busy.

[00:55:23.18] INTERVIEWER: Is there anything else that you reflected on that you wanted to share that we haven't touched on?

[00:55:30.22] SISTER KATHLEEN KELLY: I think we've touched on a lot. I think we've touched on everything. Yeah.

[00:55:36.19] INTERVIEWER: Or do you have any questions for us?

[00:55:38.29] SISTER KATHLEEN KELLY: Well I have to say that I'm very excited about the Charism Institute [MSMU CSJ Institute]. And I'm very thrilled that it is happening and with what you are doing and I support it completely. And I think that that's our hope as we move into new governance structure, because the new governance structure will be bringing lay people and Sisters together. But also we need good orientation programs, and we need good faculty orientation programs. So that's where I'm relying on the Institute to do that. So I am so thrilled and excited about the Charism Institute and the role that Mount St. Mary's College is playing. And I am so proud of Mount St. Mary's College and all that you are doing, and I faithfully read everything that comes out in the web page, and so I think Mount St. Mary's is extraordinary in terms of its carrying out the mission and ministry. And I'll put in a plug for the Wellness Center. I think that is exciting, and I think the research you did to prepare for that is extraordinary. The fact that students were coming in, and this was their health at that time--poor--and this is the health when they graduated--poor--and that you did something. Here it is again--Mount St. Mary's College looking at needs, addressing needs, and doing something about it. So I am so proud of the Mount, and I think your president [Anne McElaney-Johnson] is wonderful, and again wonderful leaders at our sponsor institutions. So I am very grateful for that. And very hopeful for the future because of that.

[00:57:27.17] KELBY THWAITS: Can I drag just a couple of things in for--for one thing, let me just tell you a little bit about something that we're doing with the Brooks Institute [Ventura, California]. The Brooks Institute is mainly photography, very famous for their photography, also their film and their journalism. And the ownership is a for-profit institution. And they just--the owners just pulled the plug, and so that left all the students and faculty stranded.

[00:57:52.17] SISTER KATHLEEN KELLY: Really?

[00:57:52.28] KELBY THWAITS: So we--this is all very recent in the last three weeks.

[00:57:56.06] SISTER KATHLEEN KELLY: Wow!

[00:57:56.29] KELBY THWAITS: So what we're doing is bringing the Brooks faculty and students and then creating a school of photography and cinematic arts. And it stemmed out of the Weekend and Evening College Programs--

[00:58:09.28] SISTER KATHLEEN KELLY: Weekend and Evening College--

[00:58:10.25] KELBY THWAITS: --that you helped start--

[00:58:12.06] SISTER KATHLEEN KELLY: Oh I didn't mention that one. [laughs]

[00:58:12.02] KELBY THWAITS: --as well as our Graduate Program--our Graduate Film Program, which Mary [unknown] and I are instrumental in basically developing and making that run--so it came out of programs that you have. So that's all hot off the press. Only a few people at the Mount are aware of it.

[00:58:27.01] SISTER KATHLEEN KELLY: Oh how exciting!

[00:58:28.01] KELBY THWAITS: So it's--you'll see that over the course of the next year--so we will be launching new programs in Fall 2017--photography--Ernest H. Brooks junior [II, photographer] is alive still, and he's coming on board in name and in support, but we're taking that slow so that he's comfortable.

[00:58:46.29] SISTER KATHLEEN KELLY: Oh!

[00:58:47.28] KELBY THWAITS: He's in his upper eighties, and he just had two different companies--that he was the president--he sold his school--they changed the name enough that they could get around his educational--restrictions, to try and keep the quality high, and so then they made a lot of money and dumped it. So he's been burned a little bit.

[00:59:06.03] SISTER KATHLEEN KELLY: Wow!

[00:59:06.22] KELBY THWAITS: So he's a little cautious.

[00:59:07.20] SISTER KATHLEEN KELLY: How exciting! Now one of the things that--I and I don't know whether--but you know, we took Immaculate Heart College Religious Studies Program. So has that any place. Because when I was--

[00:59:20.21] INTERVIEWER: You can say more about that.

[00:59:21.28] SISTER KATHLEEN KELLY: Ok. Let's see now.

[00:59:25.13] INTERVIEWER: [Director's comments re: interview with Sister Edward Mary [Zerwekh]]. So we were saying about Immaculate Heart.

[00:59:54.13] SISTER KATHLEEN KELLY: Ok. When Immaculate Heart College closed, the Religious Studies department--which was a graduate Religious Studies department--came to Mount St. Mary's College to inquire about them being part of Mount St. Mary's College. So it was at that time that we actually started the Graduate Religious Studies Program, which we brought--so we brought the faculty, the Immaculate Heart Sisters, who had been on the faculty of the Graduate Religious Program, and they became part of Mount St. Mary's College. So it was that, again, integration and inclusion and looking at what the needs were to bring a Religious Studies program--a Graduate Religious Studies Program--so that was how the--origin of the Graduate Religious Studies Program. So that was also while I was at the Doheny campus.

[01:00:45.21] INTERVIEWER: I didn't know that.

[01:00:47.04] SISTER KATHLEEN KELLY: We got to get some of this history in there. [laughs]

[01:00:49.16] INTERVIEWER: Yeah!

[01:00:51.19] [Director's comments]

[01:01:50.21] [Director first cut]

[01:01:52.07] SISTER KATHLEEN KELLY: [Extra footage] --do this for a year. But it was just a wreck--it was wreck of a place. But it was so much fun because I would take the cross-town bus from this convent to the United Nations every morning, and I got--I loved the bus, I loved the mid-town bus--I saw--you know you had--kind of a community on the bus--and I loved the United Nations. So I said, "I can do this for a year." But it was an experience for me. [laughs] I'm telling you--to live in that convent with--and she'd come home at night, and--I mean hardly communicate. But actually by the end of it we became good friends. And I think

I took her out to dinner a couple of times which I think nobody had ever done before. So she was kind of not appreciated. And in her community they were down to like thirty. And I said, "What are you going to do?" And she said, "Well, we don't know." Now how many years ago was that? And they were not planning. So I'm very grateful that we are planning. But anyway--so Manhattan--I used to walk to the Broadway shows. And everybody came and visited me. And I said, "Now this--convent is an absolute mess, so you have to live in a mess." And my sisters came, some of the other Sisters came, we--stayed in New York--we went to the Broadway shows--we had a great time. So it was wonderful living in Manhattan. [laughs]. I miss it.

[01:03:14.12] END OF INTERVIEW.

Interview Index

Interview Date: September 1, 2016

Interviewee: Sister Kathleen Kelly

Interviewer: Shannon Green, Director, CSJ Institute, Mount Saint Mary's University.

Location: [MSMU Doheny Campus?]

Transcription Date: 10/26/2016

Transcribed By: Nancy Steinmann

[00:00:00.00] Introduction

[00:00:15.15] Family and early life in Brooklyn, New York. Entering St. Mary's Academy. Sister Josephine Feely, principal. Growing up in Los Angeles, California after ninth grade.

[00:01:16.14] Family reaction to entering religious life. Early calling.

[00:02:15.13] Early memories of Sisters of St. Joseph at St. Mary's Academy. Reasons for choosing CSJs.

[00:02:58.12] Hopes for religious life. Movie "Song of Bernadette".

[00:03:35.16] Novitiate years, taking vows, receiving habit. Homesickness.

[00:04:43.21] Attending Mount Saint Mary's University while living at St. Mary's Academy. Teaching fifth grade at St. Bernadette. BA and masters in History. Sister Agnes Bernard [Cavanaugh (1872?-1961)].

[00:05:34.01] Community requirement to pursue higher education. Teaching high school. Becoming principal. Community administration. Partial PhD in Russian History at Fordham [University, New York]. PhD in Japanese and Chinese Studies at University of Southern California.

[00:07:02.29] Transition from teaching secondary education to higher education. Principal and co-founder of Carondelet High School, Concord, California. Secondary school Supervisor for CSJs. MSMU Doheny Campus for twenty years. Challenge to grow campus. Alternative Access Program to help underperforming high school students enter college. Learning Resource Center. New masters degrees.

[00:10:29.14] Other achievements at MSMU. Multi-cultural emphasis. Cultural Fluency Program. Responding to needs of Los Angeles. Helping underperforming students attain degrees.

[00:11:55.06] Rodney King riots at Doheny [1992]. Evacuating students to Chalon.

[00:13:08.07] Alumna memories. Fights. Story of Cuban refugee who earned PhD. Education means to be of service. [Helicopter noise.] [Director's comments]. Giving back. Alternate vocations: story of young woman and husband working for church.

[00:18:39.12] Vatican II. Impact on missions and religious life. Early awareness of charism. Learning about founders. Father [Marius Nepper, SJ], Jesuit translator of CSJ documents [see Nepper, Marius, SJ. 1975. Origins: The Sisters of St. Joseph: translation commissioned by the Federation of the Sisters of St. Joseph, USA. Erie: Villa Maria College]. New social justice activities.

[00:22:19.13] Personal reaction to Vatican II. Changes to habit. Sister Suzanne [Jabro], novice director. Community living experiments. Hiring sisters to teach instead of them being assigned. New sense of individual spirituality. Sisters questioning vocations.

[00:26:05.24] Characteristics of spirituality of Sisters of St. Joseph. Inclusive love. Love of God through love of neighbor. Contemplatives in action. Humility from emptying self to be filled with God. Issues with humility.

[00:28:52.02] Personal inspiration from CSJ history. Founders. Father [Jean Paul] Médaille [(1618-1689)]. Re-founding in France. Early constitutions.

[00:30:33.04] Work as NGO Representative to United Nations. Human trafficking. Sister Carol Zinn, SSJ, NGO UN Representative of the Congregations of St. Joseph. Global girl's education. Work at St. Mary's Academy. Training others to hold workshops on human trafficking. Efforts of women religious in California.

[00:32:48.09] Religious life today. Hopes and anxieties re: religious community. How charism can continue. Changes in governing structure for sponsored institutions. Funding of institutions in the future. Changes in women's call to religious life. Mistakes causing decline in numbers of women religious. Emphasis on contemplative action.

[00:37:17.02] Greatest joys of religious life. Work as Chair of Ascension Health. Religious life and freedom to risk.

[00:39:33.07] Memories of other sisters. Sister Magdalen Coughlin [(-1994)], MSMU President. Mount developing as national organization. Sister [Mary] Esther McCann [(1905-2011)], hospital administrator.

[00:41:21.09] Work in provincial leadership. Work in Federation of the Sisters of St. Joseph. Establishing Federation novitiate, federation meetings, Le Puy Institute. Visiting Sisters mission in Peru.

[00:43:36.12] [Director's comments]. Challenges to AA Program at Doheny. Responding to needs of Los Angeles. Sister [Mary] Rebecca Doan [(1910-1999)], MSMU President. Early mission of Doheny campus. Teacher education program, Cultural Fluency Center, multi-cultural curriculum, graduate programs, Evening College, AA Nursing Program.

[00:47:01.24] Renting and building campus dormitories for use in Olympic Games [1984] in partnership with AT&T. Infant of Prague (Stimson House) as residency hall. Students using Doheny Mansion dining hall. Upgrading communications systems. Building new McCarthy Library and Learning Resource Center. PhD and Masters programs in Physical Therapy. Resistance to teaching at Doheny campus. Resistance to AA Program. Father Matthew Delaney, Academic Dean.

[00:52:20.08] Educating adult students without strong educational background. Introductory courses. Student field trips. Social etiquette training - "Don't Slurp Your Soup" dinners.

[00:54:32.08] Current ministry at St. Mary's Academy, fund-raising. Community committees.

[00:55:24.29] Charism (CSJ) Institute. New governance structure. Thoughts on MSMU. Wellness Center. Anne McElaney-Johnson, MSMU President.

[00:57:25.04] [Director's comments]. Brooks Institute, film and journalism faculty and students moving to new MSMU School of Photography and Cinematic Arts. Ernest H. Brooks II, photographer.

[00:59:11.29] Immaculate Heart College graduate Religious Studies program moving to MSMU. [Director's comments] Sister Edward Mary [Zerwekh].

[01:00:52.17] [Director's comments]

[01:01:50.23] Cut.

[01:01:52.18] Extra footage: Living in convent in Manhattan, New York. Working as UN NGO Representative.

[01:03:14.10] End of Interview.